



The World of the Weaver
Five Stories and a Prayer'

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A Prayer of the Hopi Native Americans



Then weave for us a garment of brightness
May the warp be the white light of morning
May the weft be the red light of evening
May the fringes be the falling rain
May the border be the standing rainbow
Thus weave for us a garment of brightness
That we may walk fittingly where birds sing
That we may walk fittingly where the grass is green
O our Mother the Earth, O our Father the Sky
Then weave for us a garment of brightness

Hambreelmai's Loom

One day, Sheipung the porcupine was fast asleep by a river, when he heard . . .

Tak tak sum, tak tak sum . . .

"What is that sound?" he wondered.

He opened his eyes and peeped over a stone. He was on the banks of the big, beautiful Kamblang river that flowed through the Mishmi hills.

He looked around.

Tak tak sum . . . sum . .

"Oh!" Sheipung saw a girl weaving beautiful cloth.

She was the first weaver and her name was Hambreelmai. The goddess Matai had taught her how to weave.

Hambreelmai was looking up at the sky.

Sheipung also looked up at the sky. He saw white clouds and leaves of bamboo and fern and bright flowers on the branches of trees. Hambreelmai was copying their patterns into her cloth.

Then she looked at the river and copied the waves and ripples in the water.

It was her loom and batten that were making the sound -

Tak . . tak . . sum . .

The cloth was beautiful!

The green bamboo was bending down to look at it. All the birds in the trees were singing loudly.

"Ohh! Look, look at the beautiful cloth!"

The fish in the river were splashing and leaping up high to look at it.

"Give me your cloth!" cried Sheipung, but Hambreelmai was busy weaving and did not hear him.

Sheipung got up. He was a small brown creature with a pointed head and small eyes. He was small and very smart. He had a coat of long quills that could frighten the biggest animal.





He shook himself.

Srrrhrrrrrrrrr... Srrrrrrrrrrrrr...

His quills shot out like thorns.

Hambreelmai still didn't see him.

One . . . two . . . three . . . Sheipung crept cautiously over the stones to a small cave near where Hambreelmai sat. If that's where she lives, there must be more beautiful cloth inside, he thought.



But a big boulder blocked the entrance to the cave.

Sheipung rolled up into a tight ball and tried to push his way in.

He puffed and pushed, again and again.
Urrmphh . . . Urrmph . . .

. . . until suddenly, the boulder rolled away.

Tak! Tak! Tak!

Splash!

Sheipung rushed to the river and saw that the big boulder had pushed Hambreelmai the weaver girl and her loom into the water.

"Come back! Come back!" shouted Sheipung, jumping up and down on the stones.

But no one answered him. All the fish had dived back deep into the river. The birds had stopped singing. Everything was quiet.

Sheipung felt frightened and alone.

"Oh, now Hambreelmai and her cloth are gone forever!" he thought sadly.

He stared at the river and was about to go back when he saw beautiful, shining butterflies flying all around him, dancing above his head.

Sheipung looked up and saw the zigzag patterns and bright colours of Hambreelmai's cloth on their wings.

Her beautiful designs had turned into butterflies!

From far away he heard a sound beating very softly –

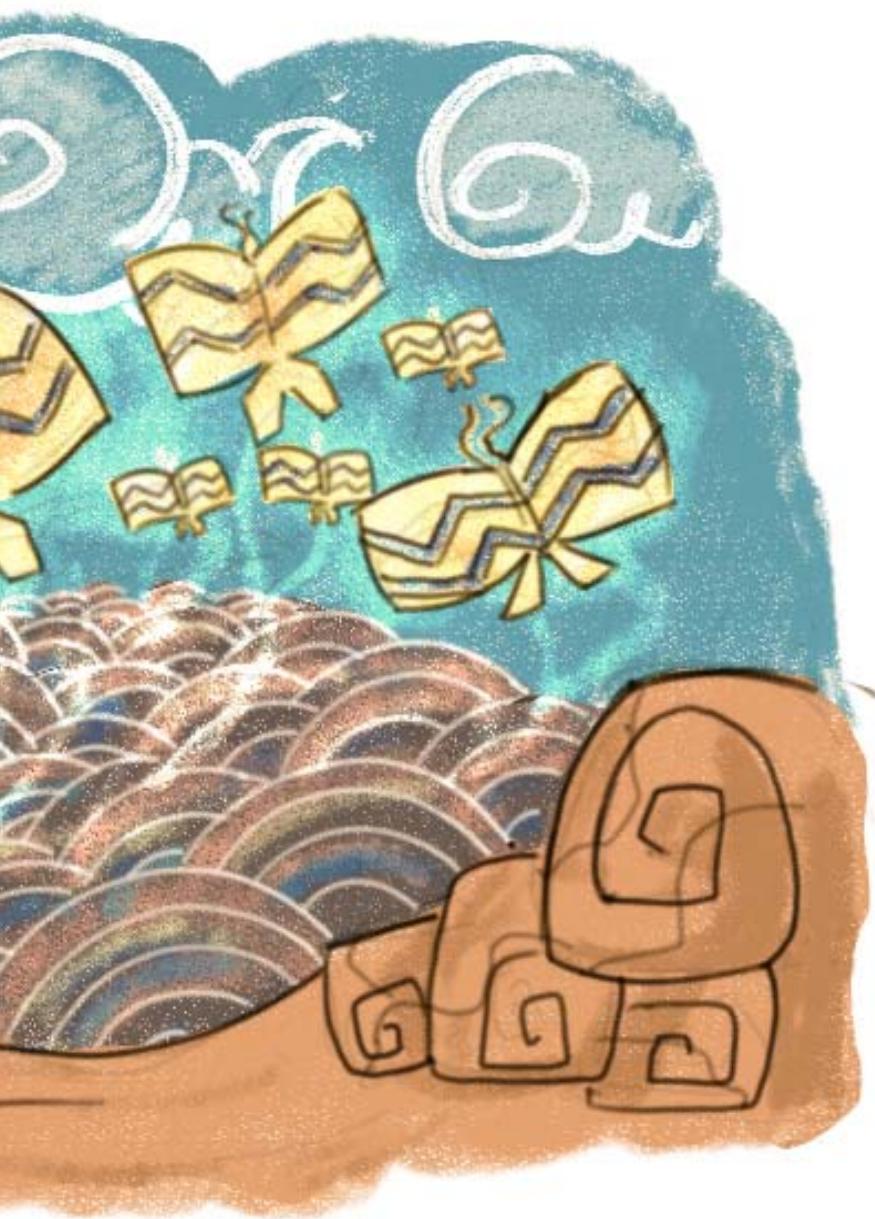
tak tak sum sum . . . tak tak sum . . .

Hambreelmai's loom had broken into pieces and along with her cloth was carried away by the river from the mountains to the plains where people found it and learned to weave.

The pointed weaving batten from her loom turned into a diamond pattern.

And that is why, say the Mishmi, there are so many diamond patterns on Mishmi cloth.





The Magic Loom and its Cloth

In a country far-far away from all other countries lived an old, old weaver of cloth. It was known that when a person, man or woman, wore the cloth he wove, they became healthy and wealthy and wise. But people also knew that the old weaver would not sell the cloth, he gave it of his own free will to the men and women he chose to give it to, and would not give it to others.

No-one knew where he got the yarn for the cloth.

No-one knew how he came to have a magic loom that could weave such cloth.

Who had made it, and how it was the old weaver and no-one else who had such a loom.

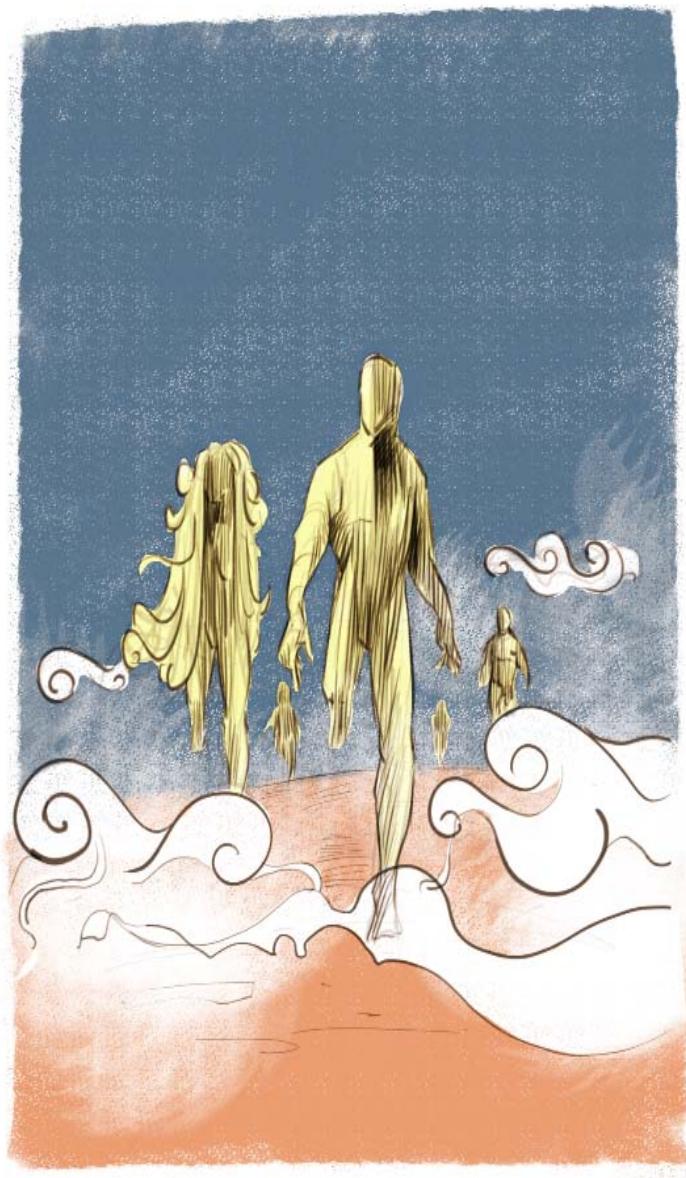
People from great distances took great trouble to find him and to try their luck and see if he would give them his cloth. It was not easy to

find him. He could not be found on any map. You couldn't reach him easily by air or by water or by land.

Looking for him, most of the people became sick and tired and gave up on the way, but some determined people did manage to get to him. Even when those determined reached the old weaver, they could not be sure that the weaver would choose to give them his cloth.

I can tell you the secret that no-one knows, the secret of the magic loom and of the old weaver who wove magic cloth on the magic loom. Here it is:

In the years when the world was young there were many different beings who lived in it. There were humans and animals and plants, as there are today, but there were also creatures who came from other worlds, Otherwhere, and who had taken the shape of the humans of this planet. These creatures looked just like ordinary mortal humans, but unlike the beings of this world they had special powers and gifts. They could turn themselves into different creatures, and do many other things which we humans think we cannot.



But the biggest difference between the ones from Otherwhere, and human beings – I wouldn't call humans ordinary people, because there is no such thing as 'ordinary people', no person is ordinary – the biggest difference between them and humans was that they were made in a way in which they could not do, see, think, or feel evil. They were just pure goodness. That's the way they were made and they had no choice in the matter. They considered this a great handicap and longed to be good from their own free will, not to have goodness thrust on them willy-nilly.

And so they had great regard for human beings who had this ability, the ability to choose between good and evil, and who used this to choose good over evil, whether it was in small things or big. When they found a human who did this, they tried to be close to them, and when the creatures from Otherwhere were near such people they, the Otherwhere beings began to shine and glow and make their own light, like solar electric bulbs. But when they found humans who chose evil over good the opposite happened, they became dull and dark and started to

wither away until they sputtered out like candles and became lifeless.

This was not the only effect that human choice of evil over good had. Because many humans were making the choice towards evil, and not the other, the world itself was becoming duller and darker and there was less and less light, much less than there had been when the world was new.

One of these creatures, shall we call her – or him – they had no gender...shall we call her Mitya?...Mitya was extraordinary even among these extraordinary folk. She, or he, I'm not sure which...had come to our world with the very first creatures from Otherwhere, and had spent many human lifetimes travelling on the earth, in the air above the earth, and in the water that flowed on the surface of the earth, both salt water and fresh water. Mitya was extraordinary not because of all this moving about, and not because of all the different forms she took, which many of these creatures loved to do and did all the time, but because she had a greater interest in the human species than her fellow creatures had. She was constantly thinking and wondering and worrying about the human species and



the examples of it she had encountered. She asked herself why so many of the human species chose evil over good.

Mitya had boundless energy and lived a life of several eons. Having thought and wondered and worried for ten thousand time ten thou-

sand years, Mitya decided that her people should not just stand by and watch humans making the wrong choice. Otherworld creatures should take a hand in helping humans to choose good and not evil. So she set about looking for ways in which it could be done.

If I started telling you of the many ways that Mitya tried, this story would never end. She tried making magic food which humans would love to eat, food that would make humans choose good over evil. But humans invariably found some fault with the food.... one person thought it had too much salt, another thought there was not enough, one said it was too hard and immediately another said no, it was too soft. So Mitya gave up on trying to make magic food. Then Mitya thought making books with stories about why humans should choose good and not evil would work. She (or he) made lots and lots of such books. But no-one read the books and all the bookshelves gathered dust and spiders made webs in the libraries and after 500 years the books themselves crumbled into powder. Mitya tried magic water, magic clouds, magic shoes...nothing worked.

Then one day on a crowded street, Mitya saw a young person in the crowd, a young person who was one of the few that Mitya had seen who shone with the light of goodness. The way this person walked looked strange to Mitya, it was not like the walk of most humans, nor was it like the movement of the creatures from Otherwhere. It was the walk of one who was not used to walking, who spent all his time sitting. As Mitya came closer to this person, she herself began to glow bright.

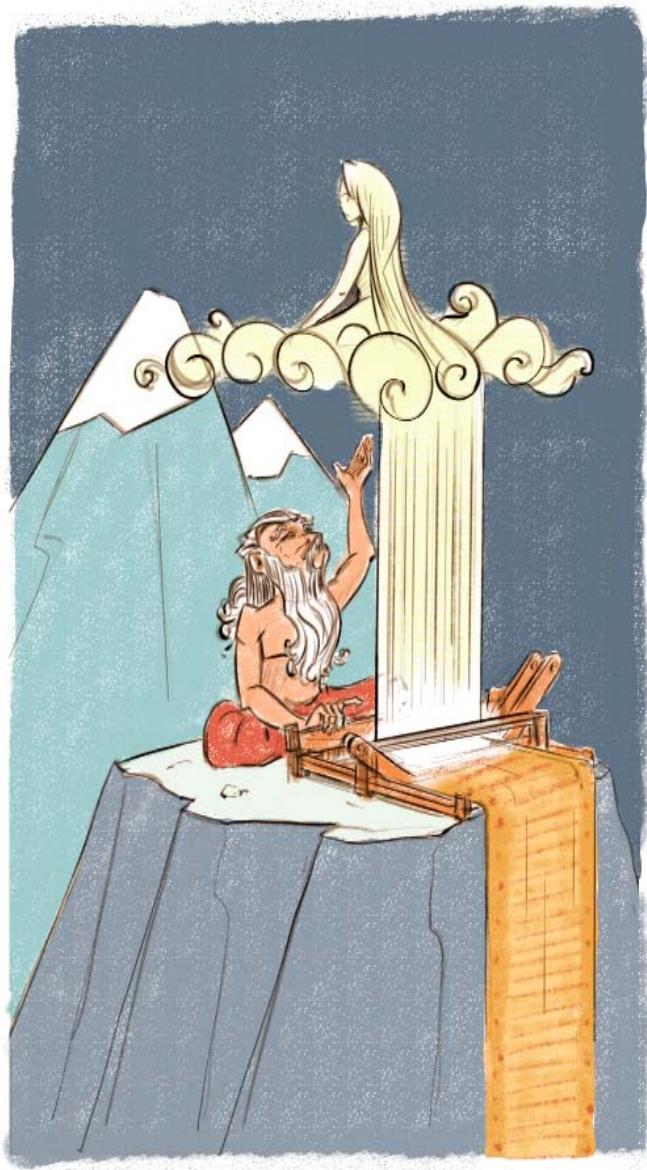
"Hello" said Mitya.

"Good morning" said the young person, smiling, "What can I do for you?"

"Tell me about yourself" said Mitya.

"I make cloth" said Jamaal, for that was the young person's name.

And he told Mitya that he sat long hours at his loom, which was why he walked a crooked walk, how he wove cloth on his loom and sold it so that he could buy food for the old people and the little children that he looked after and for himself.



"But I have a dream," said Jamaal. "My dream is to give the cloth to people, not to sell it, because it makes me happy to give it, and sad to take money for it."

When Mitya heard this her light began to glow brighter and brighter.

I need not tell you anymore. You can imagine how Mitya set about making a magic loom for Jamaal, how she arranged for magic yarn to be always there for him so that he never needed to sell his cloth, but could give it away to whoever he wanted to, and how the people he gave cloth to gave him in return all the food he needed for himself and his household.

There was just one condition that Mitya set. Jamaal was not to tell anyone how he came by the magic loom. And that is why no one has heard this story until I told it to you today.

The Circle Round the Throne



Benares has from time immemorial been famous for its Brahmins, bulls and brocades. Its Brahmins are the most orthodox, its bulls the loudest roarers, and its brocades the finest in the world. Yet thanks to the first, the brocade-makers were not allowed to own any land in the city of Benares till the time of King Bramha-Datta.

'The brocade-makers,' the Brahmins used to say, 'are mere weavers: men of low degree. They lack intelligence and scholarship. If they were allowed to settle in the town their

stupidity would infect the air, it is best that they should live in the suburbs and ply their craft there – far from the city's heart'.

Now one day when King Bramha-Datta was sitting on his throne, listening to the petitions of his subjects, the Prime Minister came running to him and whispered, 'Sire! Something terrible has happened. The Mongols have sent us an ambassador extraordinary.'

'Is that so very terrible?' said the King. 'Show him in. We are ready to receive him. There is no reason whatsoever for you to tremble. He is, after all, an ambassador like any other.'

'This Mongol envoy,' the Prime Minister explained, 'is very different from all others. He wants to deliver his message in signs. And that worries me a lot.'

'Well,' the King said, 'if that is the case it can't be helped. Let him deliver his message today, and we shall give our answer tomorrow. That's the best we can do in the circumstances. Surely our wise Brahmins will be able to interpret his sign language. It is not polite to keep a foreign envoy waiting. Let him come in.'

At this the Prime Minister went out to usher in the Mongol emissary, and every pair of eyes turned towards the main entrance of the throne room to have the first glimpse of the extraordinary messenger who was going to speak in signs.

The ambassador came in and bowed. He said nothing, but taking a piece of red chalk drew on the floor a large circle with the King's throne as the centre. He then bowed again and withdrew.

'His Excellency will come back tomorrow at this hour for his answer,' said the ambassador's companion and interpreter. And then he too withdrew with a bow.

'It is puzzling,' murmured the King.

'It is indeed so,' echoed the courtiers, while the Prime Minister stroked his chin wondering as much as the others about the red circle round the throne.

Later on, when alone with the Prime Minister, King Bramha-Datta asked, 'What was the message of the Mongol envoy?'

'Sire,' replied the Prime Minister, 'I think he wished to say your throne is the very centre of the earth: your seat is a seat of glory.'



'Nonsense,' said the King and laughed. 'I am not so innocent as to believe that the formidable Mongols have sent their envoy over mountains and deserts to deliver a message of this sort. Maybe, it is a declaration of war. Anyway, what answer are we to give?'

The Prime Minister adjusted his turban, thought for some time as he caressed his chin, and finally declared that he did not know what to say. He had consulted all the learned Brahmins and they too were as mystified as he. 'We are not concerned with conundrums,' the Brahmins had told him. 'Our job is to interpret the scriptures. Go, and consult the bulls: they may give a reply in signs. So, the Prime Minister added, he was worried.

'And did you try out the bulls?' the King asked jokingly.

'I did,' the Prime Minister replied. 'But they gave no answer either!'

'I guessed that much. But what about the brocade-makers?'

'Sire, they are more stupid than the Brahmany bulls.'

'Maybe you are right,' said the King. 'Maybe, you are not. However, you should do well to consult them. Anyway, we must be ready with our answer tomorrow morning. Otherwise,' he ended, 'you understand...' He did not finish his sentence.

The Prime Minister nodded. He understood what the King meant: if there was no answer forthcoming by the next sunrise the Prime Minister would lose his post. Bramha-Datta was a man of his word.

So the harassed Prime Minister hastened to consult the weavers.

But there were no brocade-makers to be found anywhere! Being banned from the city they had gradually withdrawn from the suburbs as well. The poor Prime Minister was at his wits' end. He called for the watchmen, and they were instructed to question everyone in Benares and its environments for an answer to the Mongolian envoy's message. And everyone – man, woman, and child – gave a puzzled stare when interrogated. None knew the answer. The enigma of the circle round the throne remained unsolved.

The Prime Minister was on his knees praying hard when a watchman came in to report: 'Perhaps I have found the man who knows the answer.'

'Where?' Asked the Prime Minister jumping to his feet. 'Where is he? Bring him here at once.'

'That's not so easy, sir,' the watchman murmured. 'He is a difficult man: the only brocade-maker living in the suburbs of Benares. And he refuses to come inside the city unless he is especially invited by the King.'

'The cheek,' muttered the Prime Minister. 'Tell me, what makes you think that this arrogant man knows the answer? He is a weaver, you say. As a rule, the weavers are inscrutably dull. I think he is stupid as well as overbearing. He must be an exceptional idiot.'

'Not this one, sir,' the watchman said. 'On the contrary, he seems to be exceptionally clever. For when I entered his house by the riverside I found there a cradle swinging by itself.'

'That's curious.'

'And that was exactly what I said to myself. Then I thought it would be worthwhile to see

the owner. So I pushed open the door leading to the inner hall, and immediately a bell began to ring on its own.'

'What happened next?' asked the Prime Minister.

The watchman recounted that a passage through the inner hall led to the back garden of the brocade-maker's cottage, and there was a patch of corn growing by the riverside where a willow swished its branches perpetually to chase away the birds. 'Though mind you,' he added, 'there was no wind. The tree seemed to move its arms by itself. And I repeated to myself, "This is most curious." I then looked round and cried, "Ho! Where's the owner?"'

"I am in the workshop," someone replied'.

'Make your story short,' said the Prime Minister impatiently.

'Did you talk to him? What did he say?'

'I saw him sitting at his loom, guiding his threads. He did nothing else. He has made a machine which works by the current of the river: it swings his child's cradle, it makes his bell ring, it swishes the arms of his willow, it

makes his loom work. "So," I said to myself, "here is my man." And I told him all about the red circle drawn round the throne by the Mongol envoy."

'A maker of mere mechanical toys!' the Prime Minister sneered. Nevertheless, curiosity prompted him to ask, 'What was his answer?'

'He laughed as he thumped me on the back and said, "Go, and fetch the King before I give the answer." "You want the King and nobody else!" I cried. To this he replied, "The Prime Minister will do, hurry." I have hurried, and here I am.'

'Show me the way,' the Prime Minister said. By now he was convinced that the weaver in question was truly an exceptional man. 'It is already late. There is no time to lose.'

The brocade-maker laughed heartily when he heard the Prime Minister's story, and then told him not to worry as it was not yet morning.

'Do you understand my plight, goodman?' the worried Prime Minister said. 'I am trembling in my shoes. Not so much for myself as for the reputation of Benares. To be baffled by a Mongol envoy! Oh, the shame of it. Please

give the correct answer, and you will get anything you ask for. Our King Brahma-Datta is a man of his word'.

'Don't worry, Prime Minister,' the brocade-maker repeated. 'Come back tomorrow before sunrise. The answer will be ready by then.'

The next morning when the Prime Minister came to fetch the brocade-maker, he found him arranging a few odd things to put them in a bag: a pair of knucklebones, a toy fiddle, some walnuts, and a small cage containing a pair of tame sparrows.

'What are these for?' asked the surprised Prime Minister.

'For the Mongol envoy,' the brocade-maker replied. 'These will certainly undo him.'

A blare of trumpets announced the entry of the Mongol ambassador extraordinary into the throne room of King Bramha-Datta. He came in and bowed as before. This time he took a seat facing the King as his companion and interpreter beckoned for an answer to the enigma of the red circle round the throne.

'On behalf of our gracious sovereign,' the Prime Minister announced, 'our trusted

friend, the master brocade-maker of Benares, will give the answer.'

At this the weaver got up and placed his knucklebones on the floor beside the envoy. The Prime Minister and the courtiers held their breath, wondering if that was the correct answer to the problem posed by the mysterious circle of red chalk. Meanwhile, the Mongol ambassador gave a contemptuous glance at the knucklebones and rose to draw a much smaller circle round the throne in black chalk - or was it a piece of charcoal? - and then returned to his seat.

Every pair of eyes now scrutinized the brocade-maker: what was he going to do? He took out his toy fiddle from his bag and started a gay dance turn. To this the Mongol envoy replied by taking out of his pocket a handful of seed grains and scattering them on the floor. The weaver immediately produced his pair of tame sparrows and set them down, and these ate up the grains in less time than it takes to tell.

Now the envoy laid on the floor a piece of chain-mail – one of his epaulettes, and the weaver responded by piercing it with a pair of

needles, the finest ones he used for making his brocades. Both the envoy and his companion-interpreter picked up these needles and examined them carefully: they then shook their heads and bowed to each other. Our weaver now came forward with one of his walnuts and gave it to the envoy, who cracked it between his thumb and forefinger as easily as one would crush a fried peanut shell.

A sigh rose from the Prime Minister and the courtiers gasped, for the nut was found to be hollow and filled with dew. They stared hard at the weaver: was he, after all, going to let down the King of Benares by offering a plenipotentiary a bad walnut? But the brocade-maker simply beamed. He twirled his thumbs when he saw the envoy and his companion-interpreter turn ashen and hold their breath as the drop of dew rolled out and proved to be a brocaded silk shawl, full ten yards long and ten yards broad.

The Mongol ambassador then rose gravely from his seat for the last time to bid farewell. He bowed, joining his hands in the Indian fashion, and our weaver slipped two walnuts into his cupped hands. The companion-interpreter also saluted in the same way to take his



departure; and he too was given a walnut by the weaver.

They then left the court without uttering a word.

When the fanfare for their departure had ended, King Bramha-Datta summoned the weaver to his side and said, "You have guessed the riddles of the Mongols and answered them correctly. Now ask me what you will, and it will be yours. But pray tell me what all this means. No one in the court has understood a thing."

"Sire," answered the brocade-maker, "the meaning is quite simple. The red circle round your throne was the threat, 'What will you do if the Mongol forces surround your kingdom?' The answer was: 'Knucklebones! What are you compared with us? - Mere children. Toys like knucklebones are the fit things for upstarts'"

"And the meaning of the smaller black circle?"

"It implied, 'If the Mongols use the scorched earth policy and came closer to you, what will be your answer?' The response was, 'Fiddlesticks!' At this the envoy produced his seed grains to indicate the armies the Mongols

can bring into the field. And I replied, 'A couple of our tamest, the least equipped armies could annihilate a host of theirs.'

'Even when protected by chain-mail?' 'Yes, even then. And if you don't believe me, Sir envoy, please examine the quality of the steel of my needles.' And that, Sire, settled the issue."

"Then," asked the King, "what about the walnuts?"

"Simply to emphasize the message of the needles: 'A nation of craftsmen clever enough to make ten square yards of brocade look like a dewdrop can also manufacture weapons capable of piercing through any chain-mail.' The other three walnuts were also filled with pieces of Benares silk, and these were gifts for the Mongol ruler. Seeing is believing," the brocade-maker went on, "and I am sure the Mongol ruler would not believe a word of his envoy's story without some convincing tangible proof. So I gave away a few yards of brocade which any man can easily buy in the bazaars of Benares."

"Now," said the King, "tell me your price. You have saved my honour and brought credit to

Benares. What would you like to have for your services?"

The brocade-maker did not ask for gold nor for gems, but simply that he and his brother craftsmen should be privileged to have the same rights as the Brahmins and bulls in Benares.

And since that day the best brocade-makers of India have made Benares their home, and the greatest poet of Benares, Kabir, chose the profession of a weaver to earn his daily bread. 'While,' said he, 'the wisdom of the learned comes from the opportunity of his leisure, the wisdom of the craftsman comes from the perfect mastery of his craft.'

How a Weaver Dined with a Moneylender

Once upon a time there lived a moneylender who was both rich and haughty. There were few people with whom he would have anything to do. And as for the weavers, he refused to consider them human beings, saying that plying their looms every day had made them unfit company.

One day the weavers got together and began talking about the moneylender. "I saw him yesterday riding in a carriage" said one.

"And I saw him counting his money" said another.

Just then another weaver, a young apprentice came up, and hearing them, laughed.

"Phoo, that's nothing" said he "anyone can see him going about his daily activities. If I so wish, I will dine with him!"

"You – dine with him?" laughed the first two weavers. "Why, the moment you enter his house he'll have you driven out! He won't even let you enter his gate"

And the two weavers went on in this vein:

"You're a liar and a braggart" cried they.

"I am not!"



"All right, if you dine with the moneylender you'll get a fine dhoti from each of us, but if you don't, you'll do everything we tell you to do".

"Very well," the apprentice replied.

The weaver apprentice came into the moneylender's courtyard, and when the moneylender's servant saw him they rushed out of the house and made to drive him out.

"Wait!" said the weaver, "I have good news for your master."

"What is it?"

"That I will tell to no-one but himself"

So the moneylender's servant went and told him what the weaver had said.

The moneylender felt curious, for the weaver had not come to ask for a loan, but to bring news. Perhaps, said he to himself, it was something that might prove useful.

"Show in the weaver!" said he to his servant.

The servant let the weaver into the house, and the moneylender came out to him and asked:

"What news do you bring?"

The weaver glanced at the servant.

"I should like to talk to you in private, sir" said he.

By now the moneylender's curiosity was thoroughly aroused – for what could the weaver have to tell him? – and he ordered his servant to leave the room.

Said the weaver in an undertone as soon as they were alone:

"Tell me, honoured sir, what would be the cost of a piece of gold as big as my fist?"

"What do you want to know that for?" asked the moneylender.

"I have my reasons"

The moneylender's eyes gleamed and his hands began to shake.

"It's not for nothing that the weaver asks me such a question," said he to himself. "He must have found a treasure."

And he began to try and worm out an answer from the weaver.

"Tell me, my good man, why do you want to know such a thing?" he asked cajolingly.

"Well, if you don't wish to tell me, you needn't."

"And now I must be going, for my dinner is waiting for me," said the weaver.

The moneylender forgot to be haughty. He was fairly trembling with greed.

"I'll outwit this weaver," thought he, "and get the gold away from him." And he said: "Look here, my good man, why should you hurry home? You can have dinner with me if you are hungry. Come servant, make haste and set out the meal!"

The servant at once set out the food and the moneylender began to regale the weaver and offer him this and that.

"Eat your fill, my good man, don't stand on ceremony!" said he.

And the weaver did not refuse and ate heartily, while the moneylender himself kept heaping his *thali*.

Said the moneylender when the weaver had eaten till he could eat no more:

"And now go quickly and bring me your piece of gold! I'll know much better than you how

to dispose of it, and you'll get a thousand rupees from me."

"No, sir, I won't bring you the gold" said the weaver.

"Why ever not?"

"Because I haven't got it"

"What?! Then why did you want to know the cost of it?"

"Just out of curiosity!"

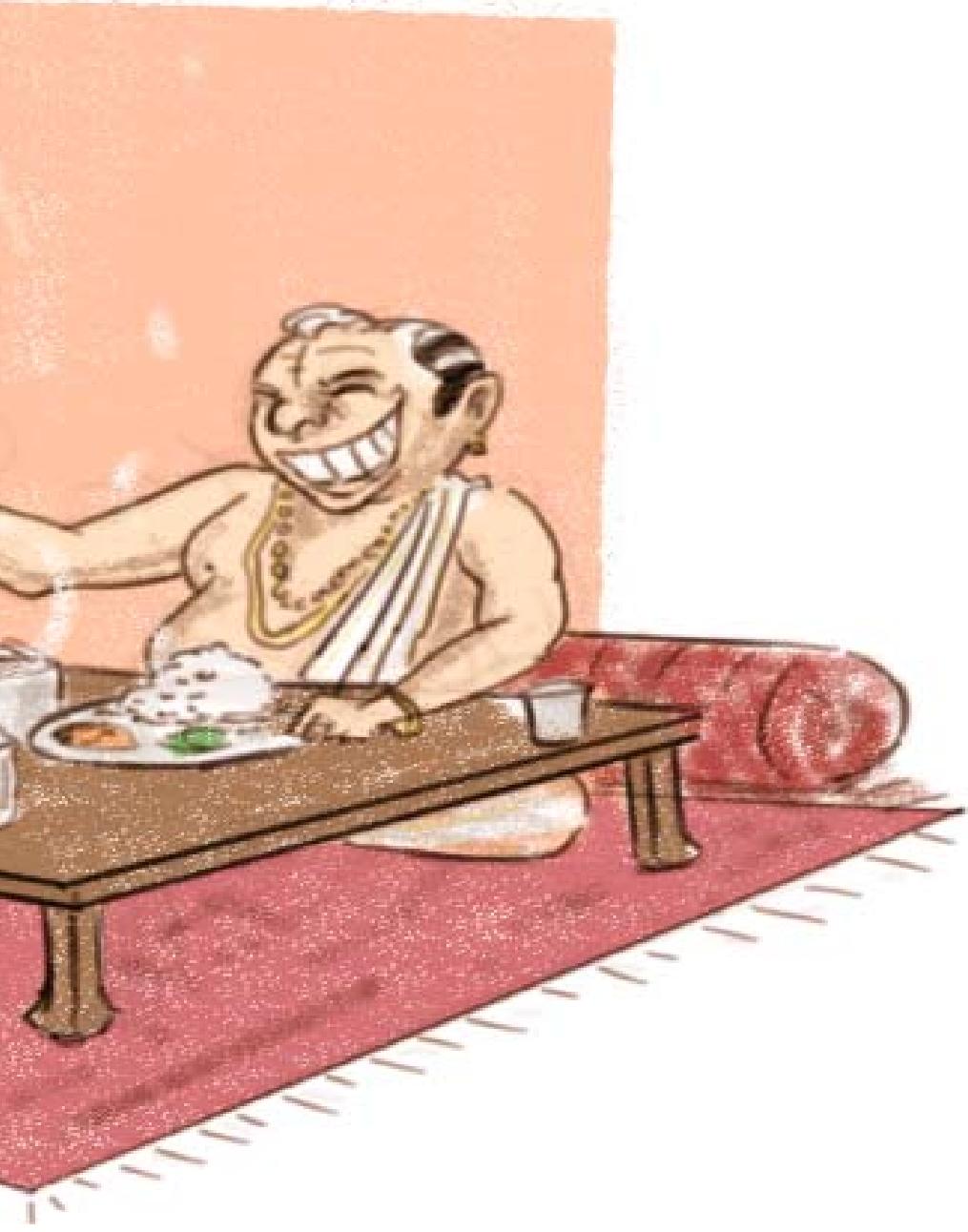
The moneylender fell into a great passion. He went purple in the face and stamped his feet." Get out of here, you fool!" cried he.

Said the weaver in reply:

"It's not I who's the fool, sir! I had my bit of fun at your expense, and I won my wager of two fine dhotis into the bargain. It takes brains to do that!"

And he went his way whistling a happy tune.





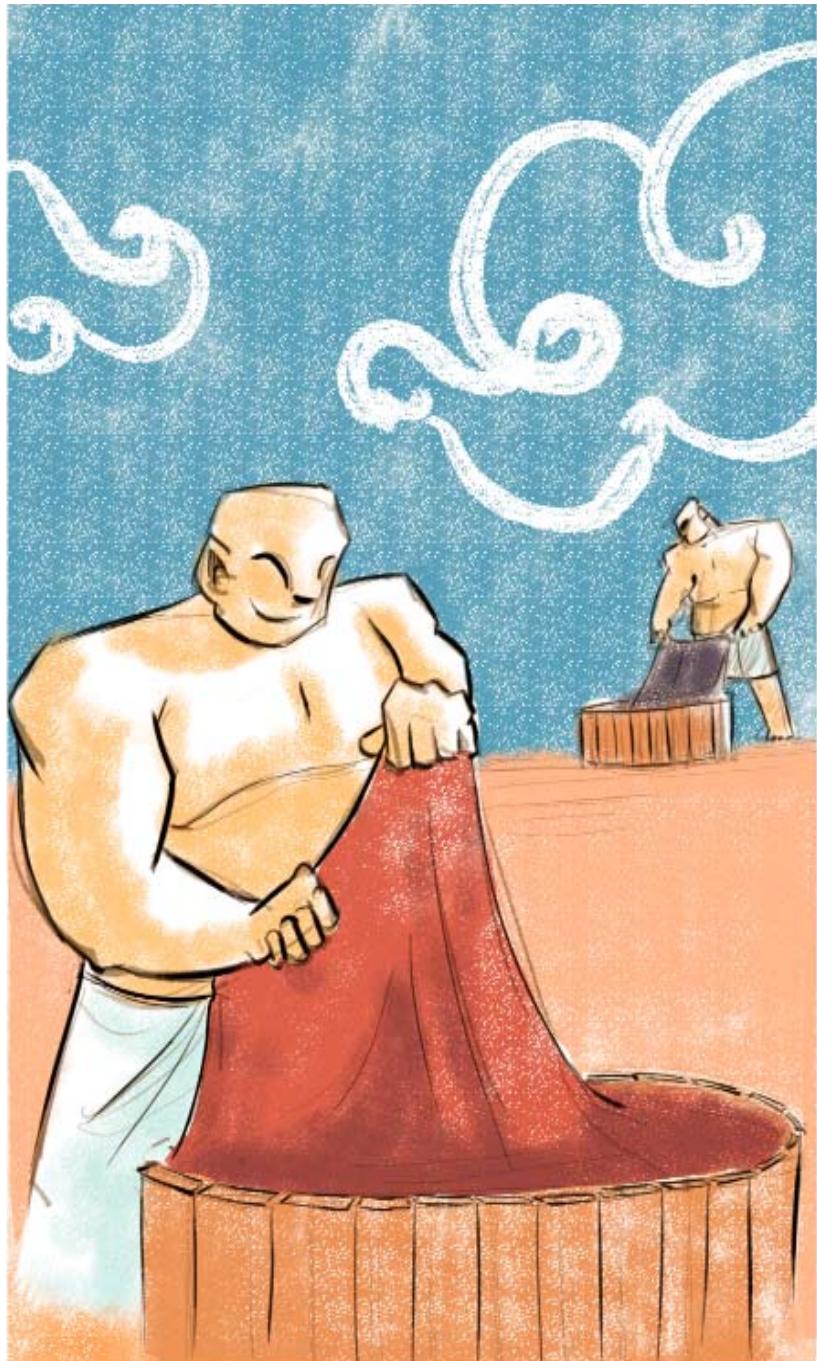
The Silly King

Long long ago in years gone by the weavers of the kingdom of Balash had made the best cloth in the world, different kinds of it, in vast quantities, enough of it to clothe everyone in the country, with enough left over to send to many other countries. People all over the world wanted the cloth made in Balash, because it was soft and long-lasting and dyed in beautiful colours. Ships full of that cloth sailed east and west and south, and caravans carried it across land too, taking that cloth to other countries. The other countries paid for that cloth in gold and silver, making Balash one of the richest countries in the world.

Everybody in the kingdom of Balash wore the cloth that was made in the country. The king and queen of Balash wore that cloth with rich gold and silver embroidery and the poor peo-

ple of Balash wore the same cloth without the gold and silver. All the people of Balash, the milkmaids and shepherds, the merchants and governors, the village people and townspeople, all wore different kinds of the same cloth specially made for them. The people who did not have to move about a lot, like the readers and writers of books, wore loose clothes stitched by tailors from layers of that cloth. The people who had to ride horses or plant trees or sail ships wore the sturdy version of the cloth that was made especially for them. Fine muslin was made for princes and princesses. For people who worked outdoors, like gardeners and sailors, who needed to cover their heads from the sun, yarn was soaked and pounded in a mix of oil and water, to weave into heatproof headcloths and turbans. Each town and village in Balash had its different patterns and weaves, so from looking at a person's clothes anyone could tell where they came from.

The reason why so much cloth, and so many different kinds of it could be made, was that the plant from which it was made grew freely all over the kingdom. From different kinds of this plant different kinds of yarn



could be made for weaving into cloth – thicker, thinner, softer, stronger, even some in different colours. Yarn makers and cloth weavers used to meet the farmers who grew this plant, and tell them the kind of yarn they wanted, and the farmers would grow it for them.

As you can imagine, there were thousands and thousands of people in the country of Balash who grew the plant and spun the yarn and made the cloth. Besides the farmers and weavers and yarn spinners there were bobbin winders who wound yarn onto the little bobbins that fitted into the shuttles, warpers who arranged the yarn into lengths, starchers who made the yarn stiff enough to weave, as well as people who made the looms and other tools like bobbins, shuttles, warping wheels and starching brushes. There were dyers who dyed the yarn and the cloth printers who printed beautiful designs on the cloth, those who sold the cloth in the village bazaars and others who took it far away to sell. All these people lived good lives, thanks to the famous cloth of Balash.

One day some clever swindlers called Pando and Mando came to Balash and sought an

audience with the King. Your Majesty, they said, "Yours is the only country in the world that spins yarn and weaves cloth by hand. Don't you know that the world is changing and now things made by machine are the fashion?. We make machines that do all the work of yarn spinning and cloth weaving," they said. "We can sell you our machines," they said. "Since cloth made by our machines wears out much faster, you make more money by selling more cloth," they said. "This is how it is in modern times. In this new way of making cloth," they said, "it is the people who own the machines who make lots of money, not the people who weave the cloth. The simple wooden looms of your country are old fashioned; they make different kinds of cloth – too many different kinds of cloth – in small quantities in peoples' own houses. So many different kinds of cloth are not needed. Our machines can make large quantities of one kind of cloth in factories. If you buy our machines and put them in factories you can become even richer than you are."

The king of Balash was a rather silly man, and he was quite pleased with what Pando and Mando suggested. The queen was much clev-



erer than the king. "Don't listen to these rascals," she said, "People all over the world buy the cloth made by hand in our country because it is soft and lasts for long. If we make it by machine, will it be as good? Will people of other countries buy it? And what will happen to the cloth makers of our country?" But the king would not listen. "Bring me your machinery" he said to Pando and Mando, and he built huge factories and paid them sacks full of gold and set up the huge machines that ran day and night and used up all the electric power in the kingdom, making thousands of metres of cloth of the same kind every day. He made laws that everyone in the country had to buy the cloth made in the factories and no-one was allowed to weave by hand. The king's police broke up all the weavers' looms and chopped into bits all their shuttles and bobbins and spinning wheels and burnt all the hand-made cloth in the kingdom in a big bonfire.

What happened to the weavers and thread makers in the kingdom of Balash when this happened? All those who had earlier been healthy and happy, became poor and had hardly enough to eat. Some found other

work, but most did not. They had to sell all their brass vessels and even their wooden beds to buy food. They could not afford to repair the holes in roof of their little house, so when the wind blew and when it rained, they were cold and wet.

This is what a traveller who visited Balash at this time wrote in a letter to a friend:

"When I came to this country as a young man fifty years ago I saw that almost all the people of the country were busily occupied in making the cloth for which this country was famous. The towns and villages where they lived were clean, with neat tree-lined streets. The houses of these spinners and weavers each had small gardens, and passerby were offered clean water and even fresh buttermilk to drink. Their children looked healthy and happy and went to school. Now I'm visiting again as an old man, and I cannot recognise the happy healthy people I saw on my earlier visit. Since the king has brought spinning machines to the country, the arts of spinning and weaving by hand in this kingdom", the traveller wrote "which for ages have produced cloth that was in demand all over the world, have now been forgotten. People look

poor and thin, and are sitting about doing nothing, since they have no work. The children look sad. On my earlier visit there were no beggars but now there are many. It looks like those earlier happy days are long gone."

The silly king was not bothered by these changes. He allowed the swindlers to settle down in Balash and gave them a big house to live in, where they spent their time thinking up new ways in which to get more gold and silver from the king. Finally they came up with a plan. "But we mustn't let the queen know of it" they said to each other, "because she will immediately see through our tricks." So one day, Pando and Mando sent a messenger to the king, asking him to meet them alone, in secret, without telling anyone, not even the queen.

"We have to go away soon" they told the king, "and since you have been so good to us we will make you a special robe of magic cloth" they said. "The great thing about this cloth," they said, "is that only intelligent people can see it. The magic makes it invisible to people with no brains. What's more, when you wear it, you can see who is intelligent and who is not. When you wear it you can call your min-

isters and find out which are the intelligent ones, because only they will see your robe." "But we'll need a cartload of gold to pay for the magic thread from which we'll weave the magic cloth," said Pando and Mando.

The silly king got very excited and ordered his chief minister to bring a cartload of gold to the wicked swindlers' house. They cleared the biggest room in their house and set up a huge contraption, which made banging and whirring and hissing noises all day and all night. Every day they told the king how exhausted they were and how difficult it was to make the magic cloth, and every day they needed some more money.

A month later Pando and Mando called the king again. "The robe is ready, Your Majesty" they said, "Please come and allow us to dress you in it. And please ask all your ministers to be ready."

Meanwhile they packed up all their belongings and the huge quantities of gold and silver they had collected and loaded up their little aeroplane, ready to run away.

When the king came they held up their empty hands "See how beautiful it is!" they

said. "Please take your clothes off and put this magic robe on." And they helped him to undress, and pretended to be putting on the robe they had in their hands.

The king looked in the mirror and was shocked to find that he could not see the robe. "Am I not intelligent?" he wondered. But then the swindlers said "It will take time for the magic to begin working, please wait." Of course they wanted time to make a getaway! Leaving him sitting in their house the Pando and Mando quickly got into their plane and headed off.

It began to get dark. After waiting for some hours the king turned on the light, but he could still see no robe. He called out to Pando and Mando, but of course there was no reply. Finally in desperation he called the queen, and told her the whole story. The queen of course understood how the king had been made a fool of. She called the police and told them to stop the swindlers from leaving. But it was already too late, they had flown away.

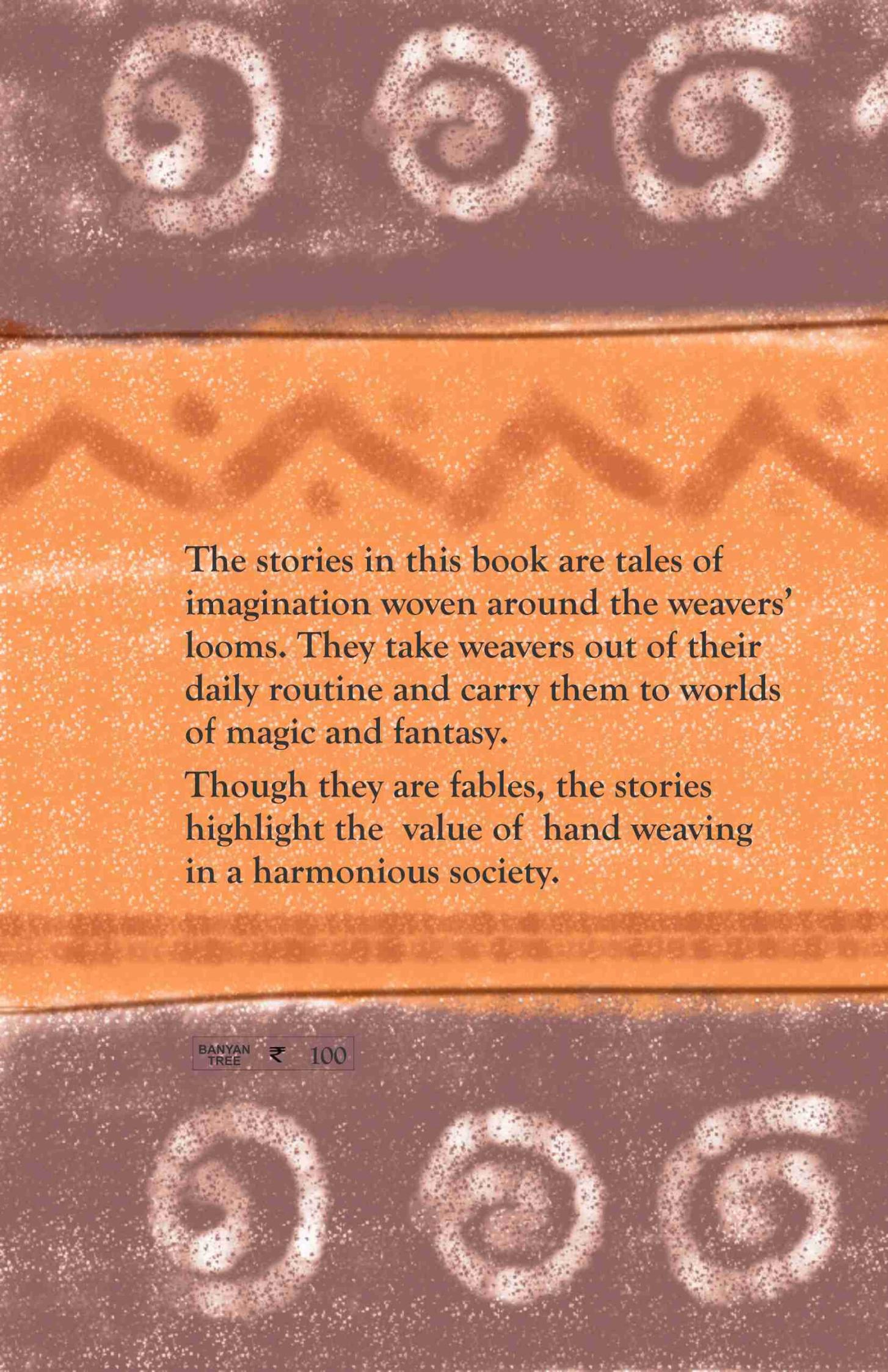
"You are not fit to rule this country," the queen told the king. "The treasury is empty, and people are starving. From now on, I will

take charge." She called a meeting of all the ministers and told them her plan. Together the queen and the ministers decided that from now on no more cloth would be made by machine, only by hand. They sent for the weavers and told them to start spinning and weaving again as soon as possible. In a short time new looms and spindles were made, and farmers began to grow the plant the spinners needed.

In a few years time the country of Balash became rich and happy again.







The stories in this book are tales of imagination woven around the weavers' looms. They take weavers out of their daily routine and carry them to worlds of magic and fantasy.

Though they are fables, the stories highlight the value of hand weaving in a harmonious society.

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